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THE DEAD BRIDAL.

A VENETIAN TALE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

BY JONATHAN FREKE SLINGSBY.

CHAPTER II.

"Questi palagi e queste logge, or colte
 D'ostri e di marmi e di figure elette,
 Fur poche e basse case insieme accolte,
 Deserti lidi e povere isolette.
 Ma gente ardite d'ogni vizio sciolte,
 Permeano il mar con picciole barchette,
 Che qui non per domar provincie molte,
 Ma fuggir servitù, s'eran ristrette.
 Non era ambizion ne' petti loro;
 Il mentir abborrian piu che la morte;
 Ne vi regnava ingordo fame d'oro
 Se'l ciel v'ha dato piu beata sorte,
 Non sien quelle virtù che tanto onoro
 Dalle nove ricchezze oppresse e morte."

FRANCESCO COPPETTA.

THE period in which the opening of our story, detailed in the preceding chapter, is laid, forms a portion of one of the most eventful eras of the history of Venice. This wonderful group of islands which formed within themselves the republic of Venice, had, previously to the 13th century, attained a high position among the states of Europe,—presenting to the world a spectacle worthy of admiration and astonishment. A small state in point of population as well as of territory, Venice, from at first disputing for the very liberty of existence with the enemies who pressed upon her on every side, had, by the force of her indomitable industry, patriotism, hardihood, and valour, established her power and made herself formidable; achieving her greatness as it were by the force of some internal mysterious energy, when nature herself seemed to have forbidden her the means of rising. But the prosperity of the Venetian republic attracted to her as by a necessity, the jealousy, and the hatred, and the assaults of the states with whose greatness and power she interfered. The fate of nations, in this respect differs but little from that of individuals. He who would rise above his fellows, must expect to meet with envy and opposition in every step of his upward path. The state that would elevate herself above her neighbours, must purchase that elevation by a constant struggle with those whose interest she obstructs or whose power she seeks to master.

Of all the states of Italy, none was more hostile to the rising greatness of Venice, than Genoa. It is true they were separated the one from the other by the breadth of the country; still they seemed by nature destined to be rivals. They were both great maritime powers, and as such, each was pursuing the same object,—the sovereignty of the sea. Genoa, though placed on the extreme west of the Italian peninsula, had pushed her conquests and extended her commerce to the Levant, and even to the shores of the Black Sea. With that commerce the Venetians interfered. The consequence was, that the two republics were continually embroiled, and when hostilities ceased, it was the result of mutual exhaustion, not of any settlement of their disputes. When the Genoese subdued the Cypriots, the Venetians gave their aid to the vanquished. At the battle of Antium in 1378, the fleets of the two republics engaged during the fury of a violent storm, and the issue of the battle was favourable to the Venetians. Smarting under this and other defeats, the Genoese republic made preparations to act vigorously on the offensive, and determined, if possible, to carry the war into the very lagoons within which her ancient enemy was seated. Accordingly a large armament was fitted out, and the Genoese admiral, Luciano Doria, entered the Adriatic in the month of May, 1379, and fell in with and engaged the Venetian fleet off the shore of Dalmatia, near Pola, then much injured by a storm, and weakened by the ravages of sickness. Vittorio Pisani, one of the bravest and greatest men that Venice ever

produced, commanded the Venetian flotilla, and after a terrible fight of some hours' duration and immense slaughter, the Genoese were finally victorious, though their admiral was slain in the engagement.

This victory was fraught with the most serious consequences to Venice, and left her almost unprotected. Now, indeed, her position was suddenly and terribly reversed. From having been for a long time the formidable assailant, she was now left almost without an available fleet in her own seas to repel the invaders; for at this very period the principal armament of the Republic was far away upon an expedition in the Mediterranean, and while the navy of Venice was spreading terror in the west, at home her very existence seemed to be trembling in the balance. The Genoese fleet, amounting to forty-eight well equipped galleys, with numerous light vessels and transports, coasted along the western sea-line of the Venetian territory, chasing the merchant vessels of Venice, and insulting her flag. Growing bolder by his success, the Genoese admiral, Pietro Doria, threw his troops on shore, burned a village at Palestrina, and gained the possession of the suburbs of Chioggia, the principal western port of the Republic. The most active preparations were now made by the Venetian government to fortify the approaches to their capital, which was thus menaced with nothing less than a sack. As yet, however, Doria did not dare to steer his flotilla within sight of St. Mark's, for though his government as well as himself panted to execute a terrible vengeance on their rival, the City of the Sea was yet too strongly protected to warrant the admiral to yield to the enthusiasm of his followers, and respond to the cry, "*To Venice! To Venice! Viva San Giorgio!*"

But it was not written in the book of fate that the flag of St. George should ever flout the Lion of St. Mark in the squares of the city of the Lagoons. The western key of the city was first to be won, and to that the Genoese commander now directed his energies. Francesco di Carrara, Prince of Padua, the old enemy of the Republic, and now leagued with Genoa, descended the Brenta with his fleet and troops, and overcoming the obstacles thrown up by the Venetians, his war barges effected a junction with the flotilla of Doria, while the Paduan prince took up his own position upon the "*terra firma.*"

At length by the beginning of the month of August, 1379, the port of Chioggia was invested both by sea and land. Many were the noble sallies and valiant feats of single combat which, if we believe ancient chroniclers, took place between the contending armies during the continuance of the blockade, till upon the 16th of the month the assailants determined to concentrate all their energies in a powerful assault upon the bridge which connected the Island of Brondolo with Chioggia. The attack was made both by the land and sea forces of the allies with great fury, and was repelled with equal vigour by

the Venetians. For a time the issue of the contest seemed doubtful; then the Genoese wavered, and the prince of Padua, it is said, meditated abandoning the assault,—when a cloud of flame burst up into the sky close to the piers of the bridge for which the combatants were so hotly contending. Carrara saw that the fortune of the day was now turned in his favour. The flames he knew were those of the fire-ship which had been sent adrift by the Genoese, and had now struck against the piers and exploded. The Venetians upon this fled, supposing that the bridge had been blown up; and the enemy pressing closely upon them entered the town, and after a scene of most appalling carnage Chioggia remained in the possession of the allied forces ere the sun had set upon it, and was formally transferred to the Prince of Padua.

Profound beyond description was the consternation which seized upon Venice on the night of the 16th of August. In the dead of the night, some few who had escaped the slaughter at Chioggia entered Venice, and announced the melancholy tidings. Then might be heard the tocsin of Saint Mark's pealing to arms: Men, stricken with terror and full of perplexity, hurried forth into the squares and public places, and there awaited the dawn of the day, uncertain that the coming light would not show to their terrified gaze the galleys of the victorious Genoese bearing down upon the city; and the wail of women and children added to the horror of the scene. In this desperate emergency the most unconditional propositions of submission were offered to the lord of Padua; and had they been accepted,—as we have good reason to believe it was his wish that they should,—the sovereignty of Venice would in all likelihood have been at an end for ever. Happily, however, for her, the hatred of her rival Genoa was destined to prove the means of her preservation. The ancient feud and jealousy between the two sea-queens could not be appeased by anything less than the utter extermination of her who now lay prostrate before the power of the Genoese admiral. He sternly refused all overtures for peace; and his memorable reply to the Venetian envoys is familiar to all who are acquainted with Italian history.

"By the faith of God; ye signors of Venice, no peace shall ye have either from the lord of Padua or from our republic of Genoa, till we ourselves have put bridles upon those unbitted-horses of yours that are over St. Mark's portico. When we shall have got the reins once in our hands, we shall know how to keep them quiet for the future."

And well was it for Venice that the haughty and stern Doria, with the memory of his father's death and of his country's shame, both inflicted by the same power, thus drove her to rely for her preservation upon her own energies alone. The hour of her desperation was the dawn of her deliverance. It is not the nature of great energies, be they those of individuals or of nations, to sink beneath the pressure of adverse circumstances. There may be, and there often is, in the case of each a period during which the moral sense reels before the stupor of the sudden stroke; but it is sure to rally, and then to retire into itself, as it were, for a season; to review its position; to look around it; to measure its own vital power; to gather up all its resources, and to go forth, in the hopeful sense, that there is indeed no despair for brave hearts and a righteous cause.

And so did Venice. Her first act was one of justice—to wipe away the stain of ingratitude towards her greatest citizen—a crime which might well have been supposed to have averted from her the favour of heaven. From the deep dungeons of the state-prison, where he had been cast after the disastrous engagement off Pola, Vittorio Pisani was now led forth to take his seat at the great council board, and to deliberate upon the salvation of that republic which had rewarded life-long services with imprisonment, and almost with death. The ancient chroniclers of Venice are eloquent in the praise of the greatness of soul which the illustrious warrior displayed upon this occasion, as indeed upon all others, of his most mutable and eventful career—that true magnanimity which can forget wrongs in the hour of triumph. And yet if there be any vengeance which a great soul can desire, any refreshing

draught which can satiate its longings and appease its thirst, any balm which can heal the bleeding wounds of honour, assuredly it is that which such a soul receives when the prince and the people alike acknowledge the worthiness of him whom they have persecuted. We know scarce any words that contain at once a finer reproof, or express a nobler modesty, than those of Pisani to the tumultuous shouts of "Viva Pisani" with which the populace saluted him.

"Stop," said he; "the cry of a true Venetian is 'Viva San Marco!'"

We shall not dwell upon the details, however interesting, of the vigorous exertions now made by the Venetians. Every true Venetian felt that he belonged to the republic,—now, indeed, reduced in its limits to little more than the city itself. The cry of "Viva San Marco" animated every bosom. The lines of the Lido were strengthened, fosses were dug, towers were built, and new works were thrown up around the arsenal. The noblest sacrifices of person and property, which, perhaps, have ever been recorded, were willingly made by the people, from the highest to the lowest, from the venerable Doge Contarini to the humblest mechanic.

Amongst the nobles who, during this terrible strait, tendered their services and their fortunes, none was more forward than the Count Polani, to whom we have already introduced our readers. Not only did he devote a large portion of his revenues to the public treasury, but he raised money to equip a galley. Daily might he be seen with his new-raised marines, consisting principally of his own retainers, together with many of the humbler artisans of the city, in his galley upon the Canale di Spinalonga, taking his part in the naval exercises and manœuvres which were carried on under the management of Pisani, and superintended and encouraged by the Doge himself. At length the little flotilla felt strong enough to pass beyond the fortifications of the city, and, acting on the defensive, captured a few boats of the Genoese that were hovering about. And so, by degrees, they gained ground in many desultory engagements with vessels detached from the enemy's main fleet; and, constantly increasing in discipline and numbers, the Venetian navy gradually forced their enemy to fall back from the neighbourhood of the city and content themselves with cruising within the shelter of the fortifications of Chioggia.

The 23rd of December, 1379, was a day long remembered by the people of Venice, and more particularly by all those worthy folks, amongst whom we especially include the fair sex, who love everything in the nature of a public pageant. High mass was performed at Saint Mark's with unusual solemnity. Old Andrea Contarini, now past seventy years of age, proceeded in pomp from the church, attended by the senators and principal nobles, the gonfaloniere bearing before him the standard of the republic, which, as it spread out its folds upon the air, displayed the lion of Saint Mark with outspread wings emblazoned upon it. The troops followed their national standard, full of hope and fervour, moving to the animating sounds of the trumpets, and other martial music, while the prayers of the priests and women, and the shouts of men cheered them on their way down the Piazzetta di San Marco, and thence passing between the two columns of their tutelary saints, the Doge himself taking the gonfalon in his hands, embarked in the admiral's galley. Then the troops went on board their respective galleys, and as the setting sun was projecting the long shadows of the zecca across towards the palace of the Doge, the whole fleet, now well equipped and numerous, bore away for Chioggia, with the brave determination of blockading the enemy.

But we may not loiter over these things. The operations of the succeeding five weeks are in the recollection of the readers of Italian history. Who does not remember the oath of the gallant old Doge, sworn upon the knightly cross upon his sword-hilt, never to return to the city till he had triumphed over the enemy? And how sorely would that vow have perplexed him but for the opportune arrival of Carlo Zeno, and his long prayed-for fleet from the Levant. Then for the

first time were heard and seen the roar and the blaze of the newly invented artillery, the two immense "*bombardi*" which daily hurled from the battery at Fossone their enormous balls of stone, weighing, as we are told, over 100 pounds, one of which shattered the fortifications of Brondolo and buried the Genoese admiral beneath its ruins. In February an attack was made on the Island of Brondolo by the Venetians, and after a terrible carnage recovered from the Genoese and Paduans, of whom over 6000 were slain, the remnant flying into Chioggia, now the sole hold of the enemies of Venice. Such was the state of the memorable "war of the Chioggia" at the time when our story opened.

Whoever has been at Venice will remember the long low shoaly strand known as the Lido. The littorale or shore of the Island of Malamocco stretches southward along the Adriatic, whose waters it separates from the lagunes that lie westward of it. Arid and desolate, it was, at the time we speak of, the principal burying-ground of the Jews of Venice, whose tombs may still be seen there. Beyond this island, and still further south, lay the Island of Palestrina, upon which a few villages had been built, inhabited by fishermen. The extremity of this island farthest from Venice formed the northern entrance of the Porto di Chioggia, and upon its point the Venetians had raised a strong fortification, which with the opposite fort on the Island of Brondolo now again in their possession, enabled them to block up the Genoese fleet. At the mouth of the 'Porto' lay the flotilla of the Venetians while their troops occupied the two forts on the islands we have alluded to.

It was a fine afternoon, in the month of March, in the year 1380. The sun was already descending towards the horizon, and lit up with a ruddy glow the tranquil lagunes and the rippling waters of the Adriatic, save where the dark massive fortifications of Palestrina flung their shadows upon the sea. Groups of soldiers might be seen straggling along the low shore, or lounging about the ramparts of the fort, while upon the summit of the fortifications, archers and men-at-arms were keeping watch. It was a picturesque sight to see the various dresses and accoutrements of the soldiers. At the time we speak of, numerous bands of foreign mercenaries, or *Condottieri*, swarmed through Italy ready to give their services to the state which hired them. Catalonians had been brought under Fra Rugieri in the early part of the century, and subsequently a band of German adventurers were raised by Werner, or Duke Guarnieri, as he was called; these again were succeeded by the company of Fra Moreale, and a company of English was assembled at a later period by the Marquis of Montferrat; and others, principally of the same nation, were led by the celebrated Sir John Hawkwood. The Venetians did not fail, like the other states of Italy, to secure the services of the *Condottieri*, one band of which, consisting of a hundred lancers and four hundred infantry, were commanded by Roberto Recanati, and another, chiefly English, by an English knight of the name of Cheke. Groups of these soldiers were now to be seen from every quarter of Europe; English archers, with their long bows; Germans, with their ponderous and unwieldy arblasts and bolts tipped with heads of square steel; and with them were men with the huge shield called the pavison, which was held before the archer to protect him while he discharged his missile; there, too, were the men-at-arms, with the lance and the sword, clothed partially in plate armour, which was just then superseding the chain mail. Most of these were whiling away the tediousness of this period of inaction by playing at dice and moro, and various other games, or chatting over the adventures of the wars in which they had been engaged, with all the gay nonchalance of men whose trade is arms and whose country is the land that for the time hires their services. More retired, might be seen soldiers of the republic canvassing the prospects of the siege, with the earnestness of men who love their country

with unbought affection, while before the gates of the fortification the sentinels paced to and fro with a measured, monotonous tread. Wandering eastward, the eye traversed the expanse of waters almost to the shores of Dalmatia, resting in its passage on the Venetian fleet in the foreground, their ponderous galleys towering high above the waters.

"Der Teufel!" said a big German man-at-arms, flinging down the dice, "I'll play no more; there goes my last zecchin, and I am now as poor as Lazarus till my month's pay comes round. By the saints! one can scarce contrive to live on fifteen florins a month. If St. Mark does not open his coffers somewhat more freely to our company, we shall have a stir in the camp about it ere long."

"Per Bacco!" replied his antagonist, an Italian mercenary, "you say true, and so thinks our brave captain Recanati. Well," continued he, "they say that the great English captain hath failed in his promise to the republic. By my faith! men rumour that he did not act over honourably in the matter."

"Who will say as much in my hearing?" cried an English archer, resenting the insinuation against the honour of his countryman.

"In faith, not I indeed," replied the Italian. "He is a gallant soldier, as all the world knows; and I for one count it no dishonour in a brave knight to serve under the banner that is best gilt. Nevertheless it is reported that Sir John was too far engaged with St. Mark to hold back at the last."

"They say not truly who aver any such slander," retorted the Englishman; "and that will I maintain against any man, be he serf or lord. I served under Sir John Hawkwood in the war of the Milanese in the time of Pope Urban. A right valiant knight he was, and liberal withal, as free to draw his sword as to open his purse."

"Cospetto! good Englisher," said the Italian, "I doubt it not, so let us not quarrel about the matter. I hold him in no disrespect, and have known in my day many swashing fellows of his free companions, Gascons, and Britons, and Germans. Well, it may be after all that he will join the republic yet, or perhaps he and *Les Tard Venus*, as the French call his company, will pass over to the lord of Padua or to the King of Hungary."

"Marry, it may be so," said the German; "or perhaps he will join the Visconti, who they say is likely to make a stir in the world ere long. But what thinkest thou of our noble generalissimo here? I' faith, till lately, we have had plenty of hard knocks and little pay withal. 'Twas a sorry warfare when one might have broken his head twice in the day for once that he could break his fast."

"Well," said the Italian, "thou art now likely to have time enough to mend thy head, at all events, comrade, though thou shouldst not succeed in mending thy fortunes. The noble Zeno seems now as shy of approaching the Genoese, as though he had not driven them before him like sheep over the bridge of Brondolo."

"By St. George!" said the English archer, "one gets rusty of this sort of life—looking every day at the Genoese within range of a good bow with a cloth-yard shaft; and yet if a man but pass yon redoubt beyond the intrenchments, why, look you, the Venetian general swears he will hand him over to the provost-marshal to take off one of his feet."

"The most serene republic," observed the Italian, "seems as little pleased as ourselves with all this shilly-shally. I can tell you they protest loudly against the plans of Zeno. There, you see, is the fine old Doge, cooped up half his time in the admiral's galley; and the luxurious senators, too, would rather lie in their palazzi than in close hammocks every night. Then, they say, the troops are losing their spirits, and the republic is losing her revenues, so that it is a chance that ere long both will be exhausted. Cospetto! comrades, I say that the general should have followed up his success when the troops were flushed with the victory at Brondolo."

"Ay, that should he," responded the Englishman. "We would have taken Chioggia as easily as we took Brondolo,

burned the Genoese galleys, and sent the enemy scampering away to Padua."

"Faith," responded the German, "one would think his excellency is waiting till Genoa sends out a fleet to relieve Chioggia."

Zeno here as stern a lesson as he taught Justiniani at Manfredonia; but we shall see, my masters, we shall soon see what will come of all this!"

From discourses such as this which we have just narrated, one might readily collect the feelings with which the troops



ZENO AND COUNT POLANI

"There are rumours of as much," said the Italian. "They say that the Genoese admiral, Muraffo, is equipping a fleet. Cospetto, if he reach the Adriatic in good time, he may teach

regarded the conduct of Zeno in blockading Chioggia. The dissatisfaction was daily increasing, and pervaded every class. The desire for active measures was growing more general as

the tedium and privations of the blockade were felt, while the discontent of the mercenaries was expressed loudly, as they threatened to withdraw from the war unless their pay was increased. One man alone of those in command stood firm. He had formed his plans, and he was determined to

carry them out despite every opposition. To remonstrance and reproaches Zeno replied by declaring his confidence in his own arrangements, and to the idle insinuations against his courage or his honour, he deigned not to reply. His life was the best refutation.

CHAPTER III.

"No treachery; but want of men and money:
Among the soldiers this is muttered,
That here you maintain several factions,
And whilst a field should be dispatched and fought,
You are disputing of your generals;
One would have lingering wars with little cost;
Another would fly swift, but wanteth wings;
A third man thinks, without expense at all,
By guileful fair words, peace may be obtained."

Henry VI., Part i., A. i., Sc. 2.

WHILE the soldiers of the republic were occupied upon the shore of Palestrina in the manner we have described, two men sat within a small room in one of the towers that flanked the fort. One of those we are already acquainted with—Andrea Polani, a noble of Venice and a count of the Terra-firma—for the Venetians, like the people of all republics, were not insensible to the charms of titles; and many of the nobles, for such a class was not only recognised, but at the time of our tale zealously protected, acquired possessions in the territories of the Republic beyond the lagunes, and assumed in virtue thereof territorial distinctions.

The other personage was one of whom we must say a few words. He was a man of middle age, and might be about five-and-forty, robust in frame, with a face bronzed with continual exposure to the weather, and marked with more than one deep cicatrix, that showed white on the dark flesh around it. He was seated on a wooden bench beside a table on which lay maps and plans with other papers. Beside him lay a portion of his armour which he had taken off; his basinet or chapel-de-fer was removed, leaving his head still covered with the camail or hood of mail made of fine rings of steel; upon his body was a hauberk or shirt of mail, beneath which he wore a gambeson or loose garment which reached down to his knees; it was quilted and stuffed with wool: upon a seat near him was flung a surcoat of Alexandrian velvet, on which was embroidered his armorial bearings: he still wore his pauldrons, brassards, and vambraces, as well as his cuissarts and sollerets upon his feet, and upon the whole appeared like one who had but recently been abroad in his full panoply. To look upon this man one would be at once impressed with the conviction that he was no ordinary person. There was in his features an expression of high daring; his eye was bold, his brow open and frank, his compressed lips betokened firmness and determination, yet was there tempering that expression of almost reckless hardihood, a calmness and thoughtful power that showed he could deliberate as well as act. Indeed, at this moment he appeared to be absorbed in deep consideration of some matters of weighty importance. This man was Carlo Zeno, one of the most remarkable men of his own times, and the saviour of the Venetian republic. Sprung from a noble family of Venice and allied with others, he had passed up to the present a life of adventure and vicissitude that savoured more of romance than of reality. He had been early in his youth left an orphan, and designed for the church by his patron, Pope Clement the Sixth, who actually bestowed upon him a benefice at Patras. But such a life was ill-suited to the young man, and destiny seemed from the commencement of his life to have shaped out a far different career for him. At the university of Padua, whither he had been sent to study after the death of his father, he fell into a thousand indiscretions; at one time he was the victim of robbers, who plundered him and left him for dead; then he frequented gaming tables, and became the prey of sharpers, and was beggared; he sold everything available that he possessed even to his books, and fled from the university, and

sought one of those bands of free companions which just at this period were so numerous throughout Italy, and enrolling himself amongst them, led for several years a wandering and adventurous life. When all trace of him had been lost, he suddenly appeared at Patras, where he distinguished himself in assisting that city against the Turkish army, that was then besieging it, and to his skill and bravery were mainly owing the repulse of the Turks and the raising of the siege. Engaging in the service of the King of Cyprus, his talents and courage soon raised him to a high position. Thence he passed successively into France, Germany, and England, and afterwards returning to Venice was entrusted with the chief command of the expedition against Tenedos, where, in two attacks, he repulsed the Greeks, and became master of the island. Subsequently he was despatched to the Mediterranean with a considerable fleet, and returned at the very critical moment to assist the Doge and Pisani, and to share with them the honours and the dangers of the war, and to bear his part in the recapture of Brondolo. Such was the man who, in conjunction with Vittorio Pisani, had now the chief command of the Venetian armament.

Zeno sat for some time silent, absorbed in the contemplation of a chart, which he was attentively examining; at length he addressed his companion,

"Hast thou seen Recanati, Count Polani?"

"I have seen him, my lord. He says that the mercenaries are ill-contented, and demand that their pay should be increased."

A smile of scorn passed over the face of the general.

"Base traitor!" he exclaimed. "If they are discontented, it is he that has made them so. Well, I shall yet be more than a match for his plots. But I am more embarrassed still by those whom the jealousy of the Signory have placed over me to thwart and countervail my purposes. Look you, amico mio, I have counted and studied all the casualties of our warfare. I have blocked up every approach to the enemy, so that no succour can reach them. In a short time the Genoese will be starved out, and the Chioggia shall be in our hands, if I can only control the plots that are counterworking me. Thou knowest how the Senators would precipitate a battle when our best policy points out that we should avoid it."

Polani bowed his assent. Zeno continued,

"Meantime our most serene Republic aids me but ill. Supplies of money come but grudgingly from the treasury. My own resources have been freely drawn upon to aid their niggard assistance, and without money my best arrangements may be rendered abortive."

"I even fear as much," replied the Count. "The army are becoming weary and impatient of inaction, and the Genoese mock us from their entrenchments."

"By heavens!" exclaimed Zeno, "were not the fortunes of Venice at stake upon the issue, I would be well content to indulge them in their ardour. But no. I shall play out my game to the last, ay, and win it, too, for all the fools' talk of

those who cannot understand that prudence is compatible with a brave spirit. But as thou sayest, there is much discontent abroad, and we may not neglect such means of allaying it as are within our reach. Supplies of money we need and must have, but how to procure it is the question. What is thy advice, Count Polani?"

"I would counsel, noble signor, your speedy return to Venice. Appeal to the senate, lay the matter at large before them. They cannot—they will not refuse to give you the means of carrying out your operations."

"Thou knowest not the Senate as I know them, Polani. In that quarter my hopes are but small; besides, I shall not quit the camp, even for a day. If the Contarini has sworn never to return but in triumph, or in his bier, think you that Carlo Zeno, who has never shunned danger or difficulty, shall absent himself from his post? Hast thou nothing else to advise?"

The count was silent. He had nothing to suggest.

"A few short months, and the flag of the Genoese shall be lowered from the walls of the Chioggia," said Zeno, musingly. Then he became silent, engrossed in his own reflections.

"There is one," said he, "I bethink me, who can assist me if he will; he owes me somewhat for past favours rendered to him, if he will but remember them in the time of my need. Thou knowest Pietro Molo, the banker of the Corso degli Orifici?"

"Ay, faith; but too well," said the count. "What of him?"

"Why, this," replied the general. "He hath already aided me to convert some of my treasures into ducats for the army. It may be that I can get him to advance me a further loan."

"That will depend, so please you, very much on the security you have to offer him."

"I know not that, altogether, my good friend. I have found him, though a very merchant in the way of a bargain, yet of no mean or sordid spirit when the state is concerned. Besides, I have somewhat yet left that I may call my own to offer to the merchant, and much to promise from the favour of the state on the fortunate termination of the war, and he is not the man to undervalue these things."

"What, then, is your present purpose, may I ask?" inquired Polani.

"Why this: I would procure some safe and trusty friend who would speed to Venice without delay, and bear a letter from me to the banker. If I succeed, as I have good hope I shall, then I shall be somewhat more free in my actions. Knowest thou any one who would do me this service?"

"That do I, noble Zeno," said the count. "Most willingly shall I be your messenger in this matter. I shall set out for the city whenever it is your pleasure. Command me."

"Thanks, dear count," said Zeno; "I knew well I could reckon on thee. Well, then, the journey must be made promptly and secretly. When wilt thou be ready to leave the camp?"

"This moment."

"Nay, an hour hence will suffice. Meantime I will furnish thee with a writing to Molo, while thou art equipping for the journey. Meet me here within an hour, and all shall be ready. And so farewell for the present."

The count arose and passed through the fort and out upon the shore of Palustrina. As he traversed the outposts the shadows of evening were falling on the quiet waters, and he fell into meditation on the sudden mission with which he was now about to be intrusted. The subject of the necessities of the general, not unnaturally suggested to his mind those under which he laboured himself, and he determined, if possible, to induce the wealthy goldsmith to contribute to his own wants as well as to those of Zeno. As he passed to the shore, in order to reach his galley, the sounds of merriment and debauch from amongst the bands of the free companions fell upon his ear. Threading his way rapidly, he reached the shore, and entering a boat was soon rowed to the vessel, where he busied himself in making such preparation as he deemed necessary for his journey.

When the Count Polani had left the general's apartment,

Zeno rang a small hand-bell that lay upon the table: instantly a youth entered from an inner apartment; he wore a white kirtle which descended to his knees, over which was an embroidered jacket of black velvet; his lower limbs were covered with hose of red silk, which fitted tightly, and on his feet he wore pointed shoes of morocco leather. It was plain from his attire that he was a Greek. He was an orphan whom Zeno had rescued from captivity at Constantinople, and the child had attached himself to his protector with his whole heart. He was constantly about the person of Zeno, less as a menial than as a favourite page, and as he grew up, his ready wit and sagacity united to his thorough fidelity to his master, raised him to the rank of a confidential friend. The boy now stood before the general, silently awaiting his pleasure.

"My good Alexis," said Zeno, "hast thou done as I directed?"

"I have, my lord—the knight desired me to assure your lordship that he will not fail to attend upon you at the time you have indicated."

"'Tis well," said Zeno. "Now assist me, I pray you, to doff this armour; I have had somewhat of a busy day, and am as weary as if I had been fighting. Ay, and so I have been, though not with the sword or the lance; fighting with enemies, though not in the field. Well, well; there be victories more hard to achieve than those on the battle-field, albeit they be bloodless."

Alexis proceeded to aid his master in the cumbrous work of taking off his armour; Zeno, during the time, asking questions as to the state of the camp, and receiving ready answers from the young Greek. First the hood of chain-mail that enveloped the head and neck was removed, then the shirt of mail and the pauldrons and other pieces were unbuckled and laid aside, till Zeno stood in his gambazon and hose. Then he placed his sword on the bench beside him, but he still retained the dagger, or misericorde as it was called, stuck in his belt. When these operations were completed, the Venetian general drew on the long robe which the commander of the armies of the Republic wore, and which we may still see in the pictures of Titian. Then he seated himself at the table and wrote a few lines on a paper, which he folded up and tied with silk, directing it to 'Ser. Pietro Molo il Banchieri ed Orificio.' Within the prescribed time Polani again made his appearance.

"Ben Venuto!" said the general, "thou art punctual to thy time, Count Polani. I too am ready for you."

Zeno handed to Polani the despatch which he had just finished.

"Thou wilt use all due diligence, my dear friend, to present this to the goldsmith, and if necessary, you will enforce my request with what arguments you find to your hand."

"You may rely on my diligence at all events; and such eloquence as I possess I will assuredly bring to bear right on the heart of old Molo, if he have any heart except in his money bags."

"And if they hold his heart, heaven endow you with heart-stirring eloquence," answered Zeno, with a smile. "When may I count on your return?"

"By morning, with the blessing of St. Mark, unless the old usurer's gold weighs us down to the water edge."

"Nay, nay, Polani; do not refuse the freight however heavy it may be."

"By the mass, that will I not," said the count, laughing. "Neither shall I throw it overboard, I promise you, even though the gunwale should be under water."

"It is a brave resolve," said Zeno, "and now, buon viaggio! the evening is wearing away."

Polani placed the letter in his pouch, and in a few moments was on board the galley which was to convey him to Venice. As he sped along swiftly, the shadows of evening were stretching far out into the waters; fainter and fewer came the sounds of animation from the camp, and save the heavy tread of the sentinel, or his deep challenge to the passer-by, there was little to break the tranquillity of that hour when evening is deepening down into night.

The result of the count's visit to the banker we have already detailed in the preceding chapter.

The Venetian noble had not long left the presence of the general, when a low knock on the outer door announced the arrival of a visitor. Alexis proceeded to the door, and opening it, admitted to the chamber a man wrapped in a large military mantle. The man advanced, and at a signal from Alexis, he took the seat which a short time since had been occupied by Polani, and throwing off his cloak, disclosed the figure of a strong built muscular man; taking his bonnet from his head, he thrust aside from his brow a mass of thick rich brown hair that left visible a high broad open brow full of an honest frankness, with which the lustre of his large playful blue eye was in thorough keeping. Upon a sign from his master, the page retired.

"You are right welcome, Signor Checco," said Zeno, with a cordial inclination of his head to the new arrival. "I am desirous to take counsel with you, touching some matters that touch nearly our state of Venice, as well as the prospects of this war; to that intent it was that I entreated the favour of your attendance here this evening."

"I am here in obedience to your excellency's summons," said the soldier, "and am ready to render you my best services, both of my head and my hand. For the former, I cannot say much, except that it is used to hard knocks; and for the latter, why I think it will not be backward to deal a stout blow for Venice whenever occasion shall require it."

"Of that I am well certified," said Zeno. "I have not forgotten the valour with which you charged with your merry men of England at Brondolo, nor the shout of your archers at the tête-du-pont. By my faith, we owe in no small degree the success of that day to you and your brave companions."

Zeno spoke the truth in bearing this testimony to the valour of Sir William Cheke. The historians of the period relate of this English knight that he was a man of distinguished bravery and true fidelity to those under whom he served. And it is recorded, that in the attack upon Brondolo, Zeno had himself addressed the knight in the presence of the troops, as a soldier whom he knew to be amongst the foremost in personal daring, as well as in every honourable quality that became a true knight.

"So please your excellency," replied the Englishman, "I did but my duty: more than that no soldier can; less than it no true-born English gentleman may do."

"I would," said the general, "that all who serve our state were as thou art in these things. But now to the matter in hand. Thy band has received their stipulated pay. Is it not so?"

"It is so, assuredly," replied the knight.

"And are contented therewith?" inquired Zeno.

"They are English yeomen, my lord Zeno," Sir William answered in a tone of natural pride; "and as such they are content with that for which they have contracted."

"True;" said the general, "I doubted not their honour, Sir Checco. I have been myself in your green land, and know somewhat of the sons of merry England. On them I am sure I may count."

"Is there any, so please you," asked Checco, "who say that you may not?"

"Nay, indeed, there are not, my brave friend. But thou knowest there be others in the camp who care not to express their discontent."

The knight was silent.

"Is it not so?" asked the general.

"My lord, I bear no tales from the camp to any ear. What may be said at the board, or in friendly converse, passes not my lips."

"Your pardon, sir," said Zeno, "you misunderstand me. I sought not to interrogate you of ought that was secret. I did but allude to what every one knows. Listen now. I will trust to thy ear, as I feel I may with all safety, that which has come to my knowledge. It is, as I said, notorious, that some of the mercenaries in the employment of the state but little affect this our plan of blockade, and speak even of withdrawing from the service of the state. I have good intelli-

gence of all that takes place, and believe that there is a deeper cause for the discontent that is manifesting itself than the refusal of the republic to comply with the exorbitant demands which more than one of the captains have made for an increase of pay. In fine, I have good reason to suspect that there is treachery as well as avarice in the camp."

The English knight looked at Zeno with unfeigned surprise.

"Treachery, my lord! who may be the traitor?"

"I will not trust you by halves, my friend. I have sure proof that Roberto di Recanati is in secret communication with the enemy. How that communication is carried on I know not as yet, but certain it is that letters have passed between him and the Genoese admiral. By what means this correspondence is effected I would now discover. Will you aid me?"

The English captain did not immediately answer the question thus put to him by Zeno. On the one hand, his fidelity to his general, to whom he felt all the attachment which one brave soldier is so likely to feel for another with whom he serves, and whose glory is in part his own, that attachment urged him to accede to the request; in addition to this, his fidelity to the commander and to the state, while he received their pay and served under them, prompted him to the same course: on the other hand, nothing could be more distasteful to the high and ingenuous spirit of the Englishman than to engage in any secret proceedings or counterplots, in which he much feared a compliance with Zeno's wish would involve him. While he thus deliberated in much perplexity, he looked up, and his eyes met those of the Venetian generalissimo. The expression of the latter were so full of frankness, honour, and truth, that he made up his mind without further hesitation. Accordingly he answered,

"I will aid your excellency in that which you require of me, so far as my duty to you and the Republic of Venice demands, and as the honour of a knight and a gentleman will permit, but no farther."

"With that promise I am well content, good friend," said Zeno. "Thou dost me much wrong in thinking that I would propose to thee to go farther. Whose company keeps guard to-night at the western redoubt—that nearest to Chioggia; know you?"

"It so happens that I can answer your lordship's question. I know that Roberto di Recanati's band keep the watch from midnight till morning. It was my turn to take it, but he proposed to change with me if I would keep his guard to-day, alleging that he had some affairs of moment which would occupy him a part of the morning."

Zeno smiled bitterly. "Ay, it is even so. Nevertheless good Checco, thou shalt keep thy watch to-night, as had been assigned thee; I shall find other work in the meantime for Recanati. Be vigilant and observant, the moon will not rise to-night, therefore thou must watch all the keener, that nothing happens unawares. In the morning I shall expect to see thee, and receive thy report of the night. And now farewell."

The Venetian general rung the small hand-bell as before, and Alexis entered. The English knight arose, took up his bonnet, wrapped his cloak close around him, and saluting Zeno, withdrew.

The Venetian arose from his seat and paced to and fro in the apartment, but his step was measured and slow, as that of one who deliberates calmly and self-possessed. At times a smile as of scorn passed over his features, and then would give place to an expression of sternness and anger.

"So far," said he, musing aloud, "so far all goes as well as I could have hoped, I know the faith of his nation, and can trust this brave English knight as I would a brother. It will go hard with me if I probe not this treason to the bottom, and then—woe to the traitor. Truly, I have myself spent too much of my life amongst those Condottieri not to know them to the heart—brave and bold, reckless but often unscrupulous. Yet shall I not swerve from my prescribed course for all the indiscretion of friends or the treachery of foes; and now must I care for other matters that press."

So saying, Carlo Zeno passed into the inner apartment.